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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the factors which account for the 84,000 Ohio children between the ages of 6 and 18 who are not attending school. Attendance rates are presented for seven major cities, with school by school variation noted. Factors influencing the actual nonenrollment of school age children are mentioned. Characteristics of the enrolled but truant populations are outlined, and reasons for truancy are examined. Causes and the use of suspension, and its relationship to truancy problems are discussed. Comparisons are offered between suspensions of white students and minority students. Statistics are presented in this context. Finally, the drop out phenomenon is described as it occurs in Ohio secondary schools. Reasons for dropping out of school are explored briefly. Dissemination of information and public understanding are stressed as techniques for addressing the problems of school nonattendance. (GC)

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CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL IN OHIO

A Report of the
Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools
Prepared by
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Preface

This publication is the first of a series concerned with children out of school in Ohio. It describes the numbers and percentages of children involved, but does not deal with what is being done about the problem. A subsequent publication will examine the routine programs and services typically provided for children who are out of school, such as attendance officers, counseling, and special programs. Yet another publication will focus on promising alternative programs in the area.

The purpose of these publications is to raise for public discussion a largely hidden problem, and to inform that discussion with facts. It is not our intention to cast blame, but to define the problems we see in such a way that solutions can be found to benefit the children of this state.

The Council is concerned about the numbers of Ohio youth that are not in school; those who are not enrolled, those who are truant, those who are suspended, and those who drop out. We are concerned because these young people are not receiving the education that they are entitled to and need. Also large numbers of children out of school represent an educational and social loss to our communities.

In addition to publishing information, the Council will provide help to local groups in Ohio interested in finding out how many children are out of school in its community, or in starting a project that addresses the problems of children out of school. If changes in state policy or financing are needed to cope with this issue, the Council will also be active in outlining and supporting those changes.

3

Introduction

State law in Ohio requires children between six and eighteen to attend school. If they do not, they can be taken before juvenile court, eventually placed in an institution, and their parents can be fined. While courts and institutions are usually used as the last resort, these penalties do suggest the extreme importance that this state places upon school attendance for all children.

Even so, many young people in Ohio between six and eighteen years of age are not in school at all, or are in school only part of the time. Some are not even enrolled. Some have dropped out. Others are chronically absent, often more than one fourth of the days in a school year. There are others who have been suspended or expelled, and are required to leave school involuntarily for periods of time that range from a few days to several weeks, even months.

The numbers of children out of school in Cleveland, Ohio, illustrate dramatically the dimensions of the problem.

- In Cleveland's junior and senior high schools, over 8,300 students were absent every day in school year 1974-75, many because of illness, many because they chose not to attend. In that same year attendance rates in Cleveland's junior and senior high schools ranged from 73 percent to 93 percent.
- In Cleveland's junior and senior high schools, more than 12,200 students were suspended at least once for a loss of over 77,800 school days in school year 1973-1974. Suspension rates for these schools ranged from 4.5 percent to 50.4 percent.
- In Cleveland's junior and senior high schools, over 4,600 students dropped out of school in school year 1975-1976. This amounts to losing 8.2 percent of the city's junior and senior high students in one year alone.

These statistics shocked us, and we sought to find out if they were unusual or ordinary for other school districts in Ohio. We have found that while the figures for Cleveland are more dramatic than for other districts, children are out of school in significant numbers throughout the state, regardless of the district's size or location.

General Findings

Our first study on children out of school in Ohio focuses on four topics: non-enrollment, non-attendance, school suspension, and drop outs. In general we found:

- According to the latest Census information, of Ohio's 2.4 million school age children, over 84,000 are not enrolled in any school, public or private. This amounts to a 3.3 percent loss of potential students. Older youth are more likely to be not enrolled. Among 16 and 17 year olds, 7.9 percent are not enrolled in school.
- More than 150,000 students throughout Ohio are likely to be absent from school for a number of reasons on any given day.
- Attendance rates in large city schools in Ohio have dropped during the past ten years. Attendance rates of 90 percent used to be normal in city high schools, now 85 percent is closer to normal, with some schools much lower.
- A sample of school districts in Ohio that enroll about half the state's secondary school students were surveyed to reveal that almost 50,000 students were suspended at least once in school year 1973-1974. Due to these suspensions over 250,000 school days were lost. Based on the sample, it is reasonable to project that a total of 100,000 secondary students were suspended for a loss of half a million school days.
- Of those white students included in the sample, about 9 percent were suspended. Of those black students included in the sample, about 19 percent were suspended.
- Large cities suspended many students, but in several instances suspension rates were higher in small cities.
- In the 1975-1976 school year alone, over 32,500 students dropped out of Ohio junior and senior high schools, about a 3.3 percent loss of secondary students for that one year.
- Of those students who started together in the ninth grade in 1971, slightly over 20 percent did not graduate with their class four years later, most of these dropped out. Among Ohio counties, the rate of non-graduation for this period ranges from 5.3 percent to 32.3 percent.

Non-Enrollment

Despite a state law requiring all Ohio youth between 6 and 18 to go to school, significant numbers of young people in the state are not enrolled in any type of school. The last count of school age children in Ohio was the 1970 United States Census. According to Census information, over 84,000, or 3.3 percent, of Ohio's 2.4 million school age youth were not enrolled in school. The percentage of non-enrollment is worse for older children. Of those youth 16 and 17 years old, over 34,000, or 7.9 percent, were not enrolled. No one knows precisely why these young people are not enrolled, but some reasons include severe physical handicaps, mental retardation, no access to school, detention in youth facilities, and school withdrawal.

Nationally, nearly two million school-age children were not enrolled in any school for the same year. In Ohio, as elsewhere, those youth not enrolled included all kinds of children, but some types of young people are more likely than others not to be enrolled in school. Non-white children are not enrolled far more than white children. Rural children are not enrolled more often than urban children, except in large inner-city populations. Children whose families are poor or have little education are more often not enrolled than their more economically and socially advantaged counterparts. The factors that influence non-enrollment do not seem to be factors that the children themselves can control.

Non-Attendance

Across the state of Ohio, over 150,000 students will be absent from school every day. Two general rules are true for the state: absenteeism is greater in secondary schools than in elementary schools, and absenteeism is greater in large school districts than small ones. According to statistics compiled by the Ohio Department of Education for the school year 1975-1976, the average attendance rate for all secondary students in Ohio is 91.4 percent, as compared to 94.3 percent for elementary students. The average secondary school attendance rate for the seven large city school districts listed in Table One is 87.0 percent, as compared to a 92.1 percent attendance rate for secondary schools in Ohio's local school districts which typically enroll under 2,000 students.

Big Cities

In Ohio's seven major cities about 25,000 students, or 13 percent, will probably be absent from their junior and senior high schools on any given day. In secondary schools throughout the state, about 86,000 students, or 9 percent, are likely to be absent from their schools. Table One presents information on attendance rates for Ohio's major cities. The Table is based on information from the Ohio Department of Education which maintains records on the average daily membership and average daily attendance for all school districts in Ohio. The figures reported below are for the 1975-1976 school year.

Table One

Decline Over Time

Attendance rates in Ohio's high schools have dropped dramatically during the past ten years. In large city school districts attendance rates of around 90 percent were considered normal ten years ago; now 85 percent is about average, with some schools having a much lower rate. This means that a city school district with 50,000 secondary students would expect 5,000 students to be absent daily ten years ago, but today would expect 7,500 students to be absent daily from those same schools. Table Two illustrates this downward trend by presenting attendance rates for Cincinnati and Columbus high schools from school year 1966-1967 to school year 1975-1976. The information presented here was provided by Cincinnati and Columbus public schools.

Table Two

Despite the drop in high school attendance rates, elementary school rates remained stable during the same ten year period. Both districts experienced an increase in high school attendance rates in the last year or two, reportedly due to programs they initiated to improve school attendance.

School By School Variation

The attendance rates reported thus far are the average rates for different school districts; however, great differences exist in attendance rates among schools within any one district. For example, Cleveland high school attendance rates for the school year 1974-1975 range from a low of 72.5 percent to a high of 92.7 percent, as shown in Table Three. The information on which this table is based comes from the Division of Child Accounting, Cleveland Public Schools. More recent information was requested, but the request was denied.

Table Three

This information shows that the differences in attendance rates among schools in the same district may be greater than the differences in average attendance rates among several school districts. Concerned citizens and educators need to review attendance statistics on a school by school basis in order to understand the characteristics of students and schools associated with both high and low attendance rates.

Truants

We have shown that attendance rates vary among elementary and secondary schools, types of school districts, and among schools within any one district. One factor that accounts for some of the variation in attendance rates is school truancy. It is an illusive factor, however. Nobody really knows how many students are truant in Ohio Schools. There are no state requirements that school districts report the numbers of students who are truant, and schools do not usually keep statistics on truancy. Records are kept on attendance and when a student is absent for an extended amount of time an attendance worker is likely to investigate whether the student is truant or absent with a legitimate excuse. But attendance workers do not investigate all absences. In some schools inquiries are made after three days of absence. In others, a student may be absent for weeks without investigation.

To obtain information and insight into the extent of truancy we visited most of Ohio's major cities and talked to over 20 attendance workers. Some of them were not willing to talk about the numbers or percentages of children that were truant. Some said that truancy was hard to define or that such information would have to be given out by school district offices. A few school officials were open and frank about the subject; others were reluctant to talk. It is clearly an aspect of school life of which no one is proud.

Attendance workers can report the exact number of students they have investigated and found to be truant, as well as the number of students referred to juvenile court for truancy, but those numbers will not reflect the total number of truant youth. They will be only a fraction of the total. When it comes to actual percentages of students that are truant, only estimates can be given. Of those attendance workers who offered estimates, they generally estimated that about 20 to 30 percent of absent students would be truant, which means that for every thousand students absent, about 200 to 300 will be out of school because they do not wish to attend.

Who Are The Truants

The Toledo-Lucas County Criminal Justice Regional Planning Unit, in Toledo, Ohio, has made a study of those youth appearing in their juvenile court, including truants. To our knowledge this represents the only study to date of truant youth in Ohio. The report analyzes the characteristics of the young people referred to court for truancy, characteristics that did not fit the stereotypes we often think of when we envision a truant. They were 84 percent white, 12 percent black, and 4 percent Hispanic, a proportion similar to the racial composition of the school district as a whole. They were 48 percent male and 52 percent female. Over half were 15-16 years old; an additional 26 percent were 14 years old or younger. They were from families whose income was spread evenly over various income levels up to $12,000 per year. Three fourths of them had siblings with appearances before the juvenile court. For 65 percent of these youth, truancy was their first offense brought to court.

These statistics suggest that truants who appear in court are not habitual juvenile offenders; they are not necessarily from the very poorest homes; they are not disproportionately male; and they are not disproportionately black or Hispanic.

Why Are They Truant

In preparing this report we have talked to parents, teachers, principals, students, attendance workers, guidance counselors, and juvenile justice personnel in order to get some idea about the causes of truancy. Summarized here are the impressions gained in talking to over one hundred people across the state about school truancy.

School officials usually say that parental apathy, even neglect, is the cause of truancy. They also report that truant students often have trouble in school, either trouble in basic skills required for school work, or trouble in coping with teachers and other students. Some have reported that many chronic truants fall below normal intelligence, but not so far to be eligible for special education programs. When the educational needs of the student are not well served, frustration sets in, and the student starts staying away from school. Another cause cited by school personnel is poverty, namely that a child may have clothes that are not warm enough to come to school or that embarass the student so much that the student would rather stay away from school, or perhaps, the student does not have enough money to participate in certain school activities.

Parents and students offer another perspective. Parents say that schools often do not provide enough guidance for the student, and often fail to try to understand the problems of students. Students report that truancy is usually caused by frustration due to boring classes, uninteresting, repetitive class assignments, and teachers who show little concern for the students. They also acknowledge that students are likely to skip classes after they fall behind in their work and become discouraged. Students also feel that the uneven application of discipline practices can cause some students to think that they are being picked on by the school.

Another cause of truancy suggested by some is adolescent rebellion against adult authority and institutions. In some instances the problems of adolescence seem to be compounded by the problems faced by students as they move from the closely supervised environment of the elementary school to the more open and autonomous junior or senior high school. Although chronic attendance problems start for some students in the elementary grades, in most cases non-attendance problems become prevalent in the junior high school years.

Our investigation into the causes of truancy is supported by the findings of a house to house survey conducted in 17 school districts in nine states, done by the Children's Defense Fund. In reporting on their study, Ann Rosewater suggests that the many causes of truancy are related to the vagueness of the term. "Truancy," according to her, may be no more than a label we apply to students to describe a symptom that has a variety of causes. She goes on to report:

> Truancy may be the child's way of saying that he or she doesn't like school, or can't read, or isn't placed in an appropriate program for his or her needs. Or perhaps that he or she doesn't speak the right language . . . It may be a symptom of a child who has been provoked by other children in the school or maybe teachers, and is scared to go to school.
>
> Truancy may be the child's way of handling personal problems; maybe he or she doesn't have the kind of clothing which other kids have, and doesn't want to appear poorly dressed.
> Perhaps she has to stay at home and take care of a parent or a sister or brother who needs attention, and the parents don't have enough time, or are working.
>
> Or, truancy may obscure health problems. We found one child who was truant because she had lice. The school system had suspended her — not a very useful response to that problem.

A study by Nancy Karweit of Johns Hopkins University entitled **Rainy Days and Mondays: An Analysis of Factors Related to Absence from School** carefully studies school absenteeism in Baltimore and offers some evidence about its causes. She found that absenteeism rates vary with the day of the week, with the weather, and with the time of year — all of which are beyond the control of the school. In addition, students are more likely to attend schools when they are interested in what is going on there, when there are special programs or activities, when they think that their teachers care about them, when they feel they are justly rewarded

for their efforts, when they receive some type of special recognition, when their grades are good, and in general when their expectations are met. These are factors which the school can control.

The study suggests that absenteeism from school can be viewed as an indicator of the quality of life within the school, as perceived by students. The studies of absenteeism in industry that Karweit cites show that attendance at work is poor when working relationships with others are strained and when the task is monotonous and repetitive. Conversely, attendance at work is high when work is viewed as meaningful and the worker feels some sense of control over the work done. She suggests that the same is true for schools; when students feel that school is meaningless and boring they will stay away.

Suspensions

When students are habitually truant, they make a conscious choice not to attend school. Suspended, students are deliberately excluded from school. In either case, children fail to receive instruction; they continue to fall behind; and they move one step closer to withdrawal from school. Ironically, the standard punishment for truancy is suspension.

The problem of school suspensions is not peculiar to Ohio; it is a national problem. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) has issued two reports that provide information on school suspensions: **Children Out of School in America** (1974) and **School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?** (1975). In their second publication, CDF reports three general findings:

> The use of suspensions in public schools has reached mammoth proportions. In the 1972-1973 school year, school districts with a little over half of the student population in this country suspended **over one million children.** These suspensions represented a loss of over four million school days and over 22,000 school years.
>
> The vast majority of school suspensions in CDF's survey were for nondangerous, nonviolent offenses which do not have a seriously disruptive effect on the educational process. Many of the suspensions were for truancy, tardiness, pregnancy, smoking, minor violations of dress codes or failure to purchase required equipment. By contrast, less than 3 percent of the suspensions were for destruction of property, the use of drugs or alcohol, or other criminal activity. Approximately one-third of the suspensions involved fighting; all but a miniscule proportion of these were for fights between students, rather than for incidents of violence against faculty or school staff.
>
> Suspensions impact on some children more than others. While the largest numbers of suspended children are white, proportionately suspensions hurt more children who are black, poor, older and male. Most striking is the disparate suspension of black school children; they are suspended at twice the rate of any other groups . . . Although black suspension rates stand out, survey data and interviews make plain that they are part and parcel of a pervasive intolerance by school officials for children who are **different** in any number of ways. (p. 9)

Statistics from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), Department of Health, Education, and Welfare provide a more detailed picture of the use of suspensions in Ohio schools. In the Fall of 1974, OCR surveyed 82 school districts in Ohio. School districts were required to submit information on the number of students suspended and the number of school days lost to suspensions. The 82 school districts surveyed by the Office for Civil Rights included about 400 secondary schools, and over 433,000 secondary school students, about half the secondary students in the state. Represented in the survey are districts in urban and suburban areas, independent cities and rural settings. Accordingly, this survey gives a reasonable picture of the use of suspensions throughout Ohio.

In the state sample, slightly more than one out of ten junior and senior high school students were suspended at least once. In some districts the suspension rate was as high as three in ten students. Among the school districts surveyed, about 50,000 secondary students were suspended during the 1973-74 school year. Due to these suspensions, about 260,000 school days were lost, or slightly over 1,400 school years. Since about one half of Ohio's secondary students were included in this survey, one could project that when all districts in Ohio are considered 100,000 students would be suspended, at a loss of about 520,000 school days, or over 2,800 school years.

Range of Suspensions

Among the 82 school districts surveyed, the suspension rate for secondary school students ranged from 0 percent (Russia Local) to 32 percent (Xenia). About half the districts suspended less than 6 percent of their secondary students; about three fourths of the districts suspended less than 12 percent. The following graph illustrates the distribution of suspension rates among the 82 districts, and shows how far away from the average some districts are.

Illustration One

The districts that suspended more than 12 percent of their secondary students at least once are listed in Table Four with their secondary suspension rates.

Table Four

School By School Variations

Just as attendance rates vary among schools within the same school district, so do suspension rates. Within the same school district, one school may suspend one in ten students, another may suspend five in ten students. For example, among the secondary schools in Cleveland, the suspension rates for 1973-1974 varied from 4.5 percent (Mooney Junior High School) to 50.4 percent (J. F. Kennedy High School). In Cincinnati similar rates varied from 1.0 percent (Western Hills High School) to 37.0 percent (Heinold Junior High School); in Youngstown they varied from 0.6 percent (Chaney High School) to 57.5 percent (Science Hill Junior High).

Most large school districts have a wide range of suspension rates among secondary schools, usually with only a small number of schools suspending large percentages of students. Table Five illustrates this point by showing the range of suspension rates among secondary schools in Ohio's seven major cities. Cleveland is the only district in which more than a few schools suspended large percentages of students.

Table Five

Causes of Suspension

The problem is not just the number of students suspended, but the reasons for many of those suspensions. Although the reasons for suspension were not given in the Office for Civil Rights survey of 1974, a national survey by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and a statewide survey in Kentucky provide information on causes.

According to the CDF survey, the overwhelming majority of suspensions — 63.4 percent — were for non-dangerous offenses. In **School Suspensions: Are They Helping Students?,** CDF reports: "In schools in very different places, with very different student populations, the major reasons for suspension are for non-attendance, insubordination, or other minor infractions of school rules which could have been dealt with in ways other than exclusion."

In CDF's survey, 36.6 percent of the total number of suspensions were for fighting, 24.5 percent were related to attendance, 13.6 percent were for inappropriate behavior, 8.5 percent were for arguments with teachers or students, and 16.8 percent were for reasons such as smoking, dress code violation, drug use, or destruction of property.

The Legislative Research Commission of Kentucky studied the causes of suspension in that state and found that 38 percent of the suspensions were related to school attendance, which was by far the leading category. "Teacher disrespect" accounted for 13 percent of the suspensions, the second most frequent category.

Eleven percent of the suspensions were for smoking, followed by fighting which accounted for 9 percent of the total. There were more suspensions for "snowballing" than for arson. There were more suspensions for improper dress than for assault, burglary, arson, possession of explosives, trespassing, sexual misconduct, and untruthfulness **combined.** Class interference accounted for only 5 percent of the total number of suspensions.

Types of Youth Suspended

The same Kentucky study found that students prone to suspensions were alienated from school, that school had become an unhappy place for them, where they experienced frustration and inadequacy. The commission reported that negative self concepts grow among these students to the point that they either become behavior problems or withdraw into themselves. Either response has negative educational consequences, and often leads into a spiral of failure that includes absenteeism, suspension, and ultimately withdrawal from school. The case studies of suspended students compiled by CDF and reported in their publications support this point, as does the case study research reported in **Barred From School** (1976) by Thomas Cottle.

Students who typically end up suspended usually possess one or more of the following characteristics, according to the above cited research:

— underdeveloped academic skills
— poor self image
— hostility toward authority and adults
— stressful family situations
— frequently absent and tardy
— anxieties due to economic need
— limited involvement in supervised school or community activities
— lack of personally satisfying experiences with other students or teachers
— a pattern of behavior problems in school

In many cases suspension represents a failure on the part of the school, a failure to deal effectively with those youth who fall behind, become frustrated, and grow annoyed with life in school. The students who are different are the students who are likely to end up suspended. As it is now in most schools, if the student does not fit, the cost is borne by the student, and ultimately by the student's community.

Disproportionate Minority Suspensions

Examination of the Ohio data also supports the general finding of the Children's Defense Fund that minority students are suspended at a higher rate than are non-minority students. For the over 430,000 junior and senior high students included in the 1974 Office for Civil Rights survey, the suspension rate for students of the majority race was 8.6 percent, for minority students the rate was 18.8 percent.

To illustrate this point, the suspension rates for majority and minority students in those districts listed in Table Four are presented in Table Six.

We compared the suspension rates for minority and non-minority secondary students in each of the 82 districts surveyed. Table Seven lists those districts in which the minority rate exceeded the majority rate by 10 percent or more. Note that it is not the big cities that are the worst offenders in this category.

Table Six

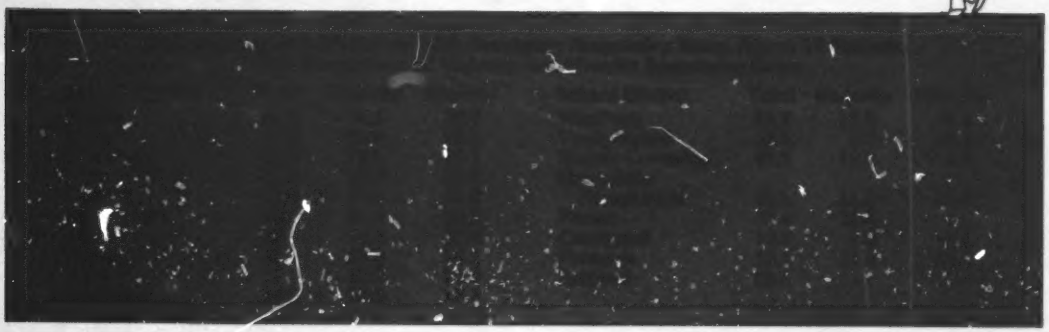
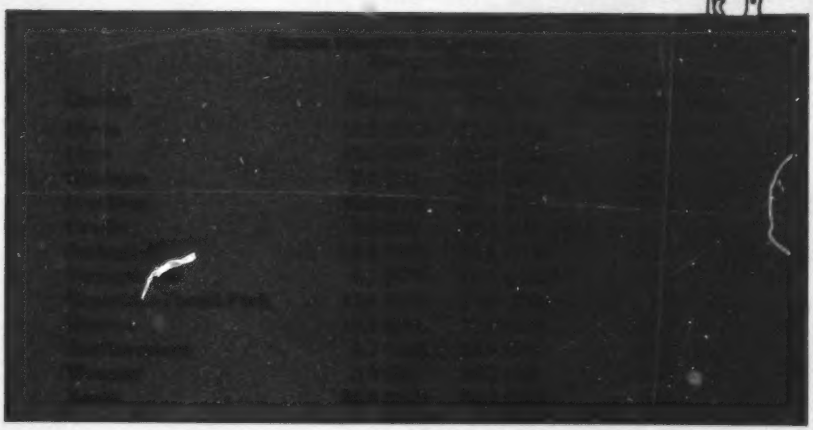
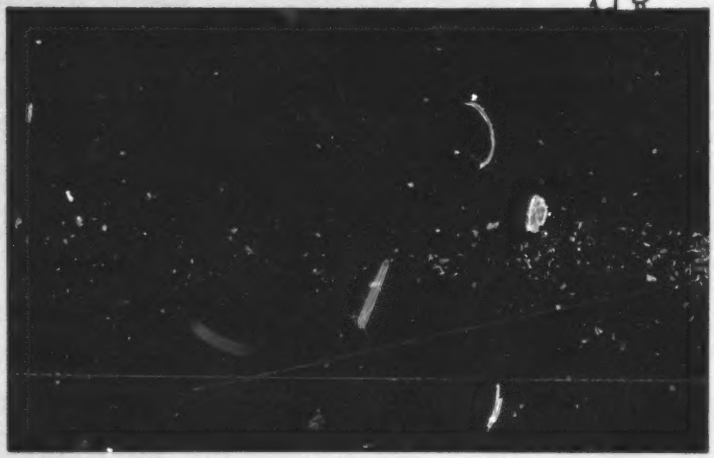


Table Seven



Even though they are not necessarily the worst offenders, the disproportionate use of suspensions is a problem in Ohio's big cities. In Ohio's seven major cities, 17.8 percent (17,799) minority students were suspended in secondary schools, compared to 10.8 percent (11,703) non-minority students. About 60,000 school days were lost to suspension for white students, while over 102,000 days were lost to minority students. Table Eight compares suspension rates for non-minority and minority secondary students in Ohio's major cities and shows the excess minority suspension rate.

Table Eight



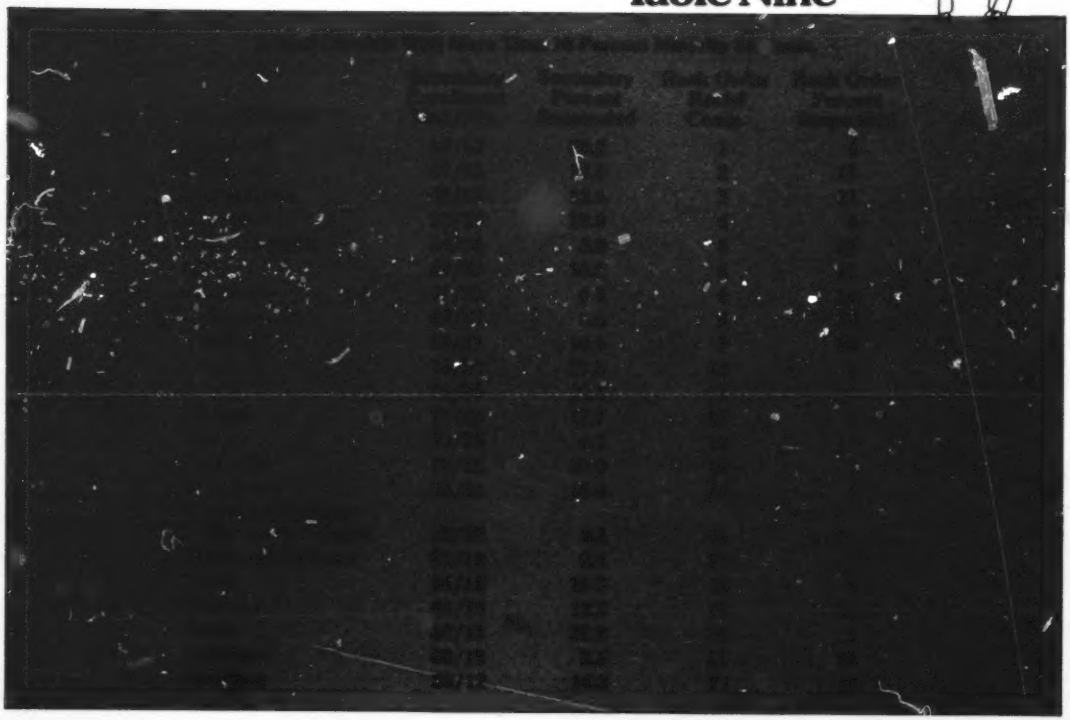
Two Common Misconceptions

Table Four on page 18 lists the districts surveyed that suspended 12 percent or more of their secondary students — about one fourth of the districts in the sample. Five of Ohio's seven major cities are included, but the list is dominated by smaller cities, and the suspension rates for the big city school districts are not the highest in the state. This evidence shows that the common belief that suspensions are most widely used in big cities alone is not true.

Another common misconception is that high suspension rates are typically associated with districts that have a high proportion of minority students. Again, this idea is not supported by evidence. Table Nine lists those districts included in the OCR survey that enrolled more than 10 percent minority students for the school year covered by the survey. The districts are listed in order of their percentage of minority enrollment, the suspension rate for secondary students is given, and the third column compares the ranking by percentage of minority enrollment and ranking by percent suspended.

The proportion of minority secondary students ranges from 62 percent (Cleveland) to 12 percent (Defiance and Hamilton). The districts with the worst suspension rates, those ranked 1 through 10, are spread throughout the ranking by percent minority enrollment, indicating that the racial factor alone is not sufficient in explaining differences in suspension rates. For example, Xenia with 13 percent minority enrollment, suspends 32 percent of its secondary students, while Lorain with 20 percent more minority students, suspends at one third the rate of Xenia. Cincinnati with 40 percent more minority students also suspends at about one third of Xenia's rate. In general, there does not seem to be a strong association between percentage of minority students enrolled and the percent of students suspended.

Table Nine

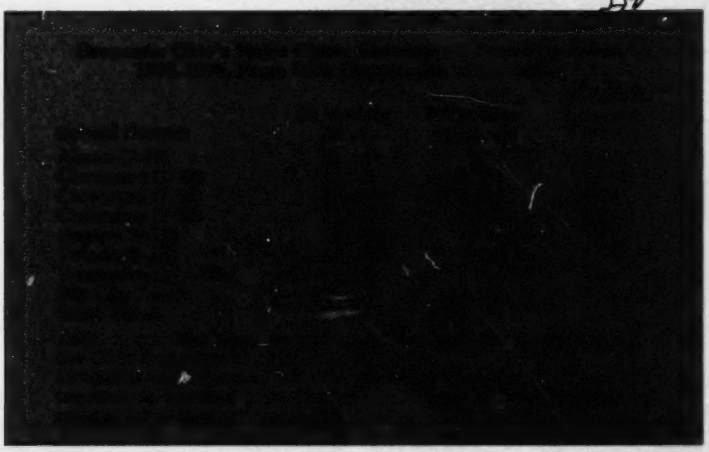


Drop Outs

In the 1975-1976 school year alone, over 32,500 students dropped out of Ohio schools. Over twelve thousand of these drop outs were in Ohio's seven major cities, but the drop out phenomena is not restricted to large city school districts. Two tables presented in this section show that the drop out problem is acute in large urban areas, and rural areas as well.

Table Ten presents information on the numbers and percentages of drop outs in Ohio's major cities for 1975-76. The table is based on data provided by school districts to the Ohio Department of Education. In order to obtain the percentage of drop outs, the number of drop outs for each school district is divided by the average daily membership of **secondary schools** as reported by the district. Secondary school populations are used because no drop outs were reported for elementary schools.

Table Ten



The drop out percentages for secondary schools in these cities range from 1.4 percent to 9.8 percent, with an average of 6.5 percent. The number of students and percentages reported here represent drop outs for only one year. For city school districts, other than those listed in Table Ten, the average drop out percentage for 1975-1976 was about 4 percent. The

city school districts with the worst yearly drop out rates would include the following: Alliance (7.0%), East Cleveland (8.0%), Hamilton (6.2%), Lockland (6.0%), London (6.7%), Marion (8.9%), Painesville (14.2%), Portsmouth (7.0%), St. Bernard-Elmwood Place (6.4%), Sandusky (10.7%), South Western (6.2%), Steubenville (8.0%), Wadsworth (6.8%), and Washington Court House (8.9%).

Another approach to counting the number of drop outs is to take the number of ninth grade students in a particular year and see how many of those students graduate four years later. Such an approach was taken by comparing the number of ninth grade students enrolled in Ohio schools in 1971 with the number of high school graduates four years later in 1975. Such information is available from the Ohio Department of Education. This comparison shows the number of non-graduating students during a single four year period. Counted as non-graduates are those students who officially dropped out, and those who did not otherwise graduate with their peers, including students who moved from the state. To obtain the percentage of non-graduates, the number of students not graduating with their peers is divided by the number of students originally enrolled in the ninth grade. In such a manner percentages of non-graduates were calculated for each Ohio county, including all school districts within each county. Among Ohio counties, the percentages of non-graduates ranged from 5.3 percent to 32.3 percent, with the state average being 20.9 percent. The greatest percentages of non-graduates were found in small, rural counties, those without large industrial centers, especially in the state's southern region. Table Eleven lists those counties (with their major cities) which have the greatest percentage of non-graduates.

Table Eleven

Nationally, about one in four students are likely to drop out of school. A recent examination of school withdrawal by the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that about three fourths of America's youth graduate from high school today, the remaining one fourth drop out before receiving their diploma. This estimate was derived by comparing the 3.1 million high school students who graduated in 1974 with the 4.1 million students in the fifth grade eight years earlier. The computation shows that approximately one million young people failed to graduate with their class in 1974.

Why Drop Out

A study by Paul Bowman and Charles Matthews presents the reasons given by students for dropping out of school. The report is based on 138 school drop outs from a class of 487 students in Quincy, Illinois. The reasons given by drop outs themselves included the following:

21% — just did not like school
20% — academic failure
18% — poor social adjustment
16% — work or financial need
9% — pregnancy
6% — teachers unfair

The same study found that the attendance records of drop outs grew progressively worse throughout high school, and as a group, their reading scores were much lower than their counterparts who stayed in school.

The connection between truancy and dropping out of school was also found by a group of psychologists from the University of Chicago who conducted detailed case studies of 105 intellectually able drop outs. They report:

> Truancy represents an active form of aggression against school requirements. It signifies that a child is so pressed and finds school so unpalatable that he must escape it, even at the risk of severe penalties. Truancy is a logical forerunner to leaving school; both represent a running away, a technique of avoidance.

Hyrum Smith, former head of the Federal Drop Out Prevention Office, claims that many drop outs represent the school's failure to teach basic academic skills.

> It is very clear that children who do not learn the basic skills, who cannot read, who cannot compute simple arithmetic by the time they get in junior high school and high school, will find it difficult and virtually impossible to compete with their peer group. Rather than be embarrassed, they will find excuses to drop out of school as soon as they are eligible.

Several studies published by Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, in a book **Antecedents and Consequences of Early School Leaving,** indicate that school drop outs usually have a poor self image or low self esteem, as well as negative feelings about home and school.

In general, school drop outs tend to lack basic academic skills, a positive sense of self, and successful school experiences. They are likely to be alienated and frustrated. These characteristics are also shared by students who are chronically absent and prone to suspension. And dropping out of school often amounts to the final expression of dissatisfaction on the part of students who either do not have the ability or support from others to achieve in traditional school programs, or who are pushed out of school because they are different, need special attention, or may be difficult to handle.

Conclusions

Large numbers of school age children in Ohio are not in school. Their desks are empty, and they are not receiving the education they are entitled to.

In Ohio 7.9 percent of young people 16 and 17 years old are not enrolled in school at all. They are not necessarily drop outs, some have never seen the inside of a school. Of those enrolled in secondary schools, eight or nine percent are lost **per year** as school dropouts. These ex-students often enter the growing ranks of unemployed youth.

Attendance rates in Ohio's city schools are declining, so that now 15 percent of secondary students are expected to be absent every day, with some schools expecting between 20 and 30 percent to be out. We have heard that schools even plan for this, and if all the students were to come on any one day, the school would not be able to cope with them all.

Throughout Ohio about 100,000 junior and senior high students are likely to lose over a half a million school days due to suspension. Several school districts suspend one in five students, and some individual schools suspend between one third and one half of their students. A large proportion of these suspensions will be for irregular school attendance, and most suspensions will not be for disturbing the learning environment in schools.

Among Ohio districts there exists a wide range in rates of absenteeism, suspensions, and school drop outs. Even within a district, there often exists a range of rates that requires school by school examination. Clearly, there are certain districts, and schools within districts, where attendance rates are too low, where suspensions are used abusively, and where large numbers of drop outs signal trouble. Those districts and schools require some immediate action.

Information about school attendance rates and school suspension rates is not readily accessible in most school districts we have investigated. We are grateful to those who have shared their time with us in our effort to better understand the problems associated with children out of school, but up to date statistics on attendance, suspension, and drop out rates for individual schools within a system are often hidden. Making such information difficult to acquire, makes it harder to develop public understanding in an area in which public sympathy and cooperation is absolutely necessary.

Schools reflect the habits and conditions of the communities and society that surround and support them. School children bring to school with them the inequities that exist in America. Even if our schools strive for equal educational opportunity, they work against the pervasive forces of poverty, racism, and social-class bias. However, schools do not have to cure these ills to provide education programs that develop basic academic skills, and allow for successful learning experiences. The numbers of children out of school in Ohio reflect not only fundamental inequities in our society, but also the failure of schools to give meaningful educational services to a significant number of school age youth.

We need to understand more clearly the meaning behind the numbers of children who refuse their schooling, or are excluded from school by official action. What does this say about our schools and communities? What can we as citizens do to ensure that public education becomes an important part of the lives of **all** Ohio youth.

The Citizens' Council is an independent statewide organization providing information to interested citizens and officials on four issues: school desegregation, school finance, school management, and the problems of children out of school. The Council encourages active citizen involvement in school and district policy making and provides assistance to state and local groups on the issues. The work of the Council is supported by foundation grants and corporate contributions.

Other publications of the Council are:

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Desegregation in Ohio: Background for Current Litigation	$ .30
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Court Mandated Citizen Participation in School Desegregation: Monitoring Commission	$1.50

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